

Message Text

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PAGE 01 ADDIS 01261 01 OF 02 171431Z

ACTION AF-10

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FM AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7703

INFO AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DJIBOUTI

AMEMBASSY FREETOWN

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY SANA

USINT HAVANA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ADDIS ABABA 1261

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PEPR, PINS, ET, SU

SUBJ: SUDANESE THINKING ON ERITREA

REF: KHARTOUM 1123 (NOTAL)

SUMMARY AND COMMENT: ACCORDING TO SUDANESE EMBASSY SOURCES,
SUDAN WILL MAKE CONCERTED EFFORT TO PERSUADE ETHIOPIA AND
ERITREAN INSURRECTIONIST GROUPS TO REACH POLITICAL SOLU-
TION BASED ON SOME DEGREE OF SELF-GOVERNMENT FOR ERITREA
(OR MOST THEREOF) UNDER ETHIOPIAN SOVEREIGNTY. SERIES OF
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PAGE 02 ADDIS 01261 01 OF 02 171431Z

VISITS TO KHARTOUM AND ADDIS OF ETHIOPIAN MOFA PERMSEC,
SUDANESE VICE PRESIDENT, AND INTERMINISTERIAL COMMISSION
DESIGNED BY SUDANESE TO FORWARD THIS GOAL. INITIATIVE IN-
TENDED TO TEST ETHIOPIAN PROFESSIONS OF WISHING TO REMAIN
NONALIGNED, TO PREVENT ESCALATION OF FIGHTING IN ERITREA
WHICH COULD ULTIMATELY THREATEN TO INVOLVE SUDAN, AND TO
REMOVE YET ANOTHER PRETEXT FOR CONTINUED PRESENCE OF SOVIET

AND CUBAN MILITARY FORCES IN ETHIOPIA. ALTHOUGH MUCH OF SUDANESE THINKING IS BASED ON PREMISES WHICH ARE QUESTIONABLE AT BEST, DIPLOMATIC APPROACH OF THIS KIND MAKES GOOD SENSE FROM SUDANESE STANDPOINT. IT ALSO POINTS TO POSSIBLE SOLUTION WHICH, IN EMBASSY'S VIEW, US SHOULD DISCREETLY SUPPORT, PARTICULARLY WITH SAUDI ARABIA, IF SUDANESE CARRY THROUGH BY THREATENING, AS SUDANESE CHARGE HERE HAS SUGGESTED, TO CUT OFF SUPPLY TRANSIT FACILITIES TO INSURGENT GROUPS AS MEANS OF PUSHING THEM TO BARGAINING TABLE. THERE ARE INTERESTING PARALLELS BETWEEN SUDANESE AND KENYA THINKING, SINCE BOTH COUNTRIES APPEAR TO WANT TO DO THEIR BIT TO SEND SOVIETS AND CUBANS ON THEIR WAY, NOW THAT OGADEN WAR IS OVER. END SUMMARYM

1. SUDANESE CHARGE GAWISH DISCUSSED WITH POLCOUNS SUDANESE THINKING ON CURRENT ETHIO-SUDANESE DIALOGUE TO IMPROVE RELATIONS. WITH DENOUEMENT IN OGADEN VERY MUCH ON THEIR MINDS, SUDANESE HAVE APPARENTLY DECIDED TO MAKE ALL OUT EFFORT TO CONVINCE BOTH ERITREANS AND ETHIOPIA TO COME TO POLITICAL SETTLEMENT OF THEIR DIFFERENCES. SUDANESE ARGUMENT WITH ERITREANS IS THAT, BY AGREEING TO NEGOTIATE NOW WHEN THEIR MILITARY POSITIONS AND STRENGTH ARE STILL AT THEIR PEAK, THEY CAN HOPE TO SALVAGE SOME DEGREE OF SELF-RULE, WHEREAS IF THEY WAIT UNTIL ETHIOPIAN MILITARY FORTUNES IN ERITREA IMPROVE, AS THEY ARE BOUND TO DO BEFORE LONG, ERITREANS COULD WELL END UP WITH NOTHING AT ALL.

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PAGE 03 ADDIS 01261 01 OF 02 171431Z

2. GAWISH LIKEWISE BELIEVES ETHIOPIANS MIGHT BE INTERESTED.

HE IS AWARE THAT EPMG HAS TRADITIONALLY FAVORED MILITARY SOLUTION TO ERITREAN PROBLEM WITH NO CONCESSIONS OF ANY KIND TO INSURGENTS. HE ALSO IS COGNIZANT OF DANGER THAT ETHIOPIANS WILL NOW RELOCATE SUBSTANTIAL PORTIONS OF ITS OGADEN FORCES TO NORTH AND, WITH CUBAN AND SOVIET ASSISTANCE, BEGIN SLOW AND RELENTLESS BEATING DOWN OF ERITREAN DEFENSES, REOCCUPATION OF MAJOR CITIES, AND REESTABLISHMENT OF SUPPLY LINES. FOR VARIOUS REASONS, HOWEVER, HE THINKS ETHIOPIANS, AND POSSIBLY EVEN SOVIETS, MAY SETTLE FOR AN ALTERNATE COURSE.

3. GAWISH'S EVIDENCE. BILATERALLY, SUDANESE ARE ENCOURAGED BY MORE FORTHCOMING EPMG ATTITUDE. VISIT TO ADDIS MARCH 2, OF SIERRA LEONE FOREIGN MINISTER CONTEH HELPED TO OVERCOME

LOGJAM CREATED BY EARLIER EPMG REFUSAL TO RECEIVE SUDANESE VICE PRESIDENT ABUL GASSIM MOHAMED IBRAHIM. MOREOVER, PMAC CHAIRMAN MENGISTU REPORTEDLY TOLD MINISTER CONTEH THAT ETHIOPIA IS PREPARED TO GO EVEN BYOND ITS NINE POINT PROGRAM ON ERITREA IF THAT WOULD BRING FORWARD MOVEMENT. MOFA PERMSEC DAWIT WOLDE-GHIORGIS IS NOW IN KHARTOUM TO DISCUSS OUTSTANDING

BILATERAL PROBLEMS. THEREAFTER, PROBABLY EARLY IN APRIL, IT IS EXPECTED THAT VICE PRESIDENT ABUL GASSIM WILL MAKE HIS VISIT TO ADDIS, PAVING WAY FOR MEETING NOT LONG THEREAFTER OF BILATERAL INTERMINISTERIAL COMMISSION, WHICH HAS BEEN MORIBUND FOR SOME TIME. GAWISH TOOK AS OPTIMISTIC SIGN FACT THAT PLANNING FOR ALL THESE VISITS IS ALREADY WELL ALONG, WHICH SHOWS EVIDENCE OF ETHIOPIAN WILLINGNESS TO TACKLE OUTSTANDING PROBLEMS. "AND AFTER ALL," GAWISH SAID, "ETHIOPIA AND SUDAN HAVE ONLY ONE REAL PROBLEM, AND THAT IS ERITREA."

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PAGE 01 ADDIS 01261 02 OF 02 171520Z
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 ADDIS ABABA 1261

4. AS REASON FOR NEW UPSURGE OF ETHIOPIAN REASONABLENESS, GAWISH SEES SIGNS OF RESURGENCE OF MODERATION AT TOP LEVELS OF DIRG. HE POINTED TO FACT THAT HARDLINER SECOND LT LEGESSE ASFAW HAS NOT BEEN SEEN IN PUBLIC OR PRESS SINCE FEB 1 MASS RALLY AND TO WIDESPREAD DIPLOMATIC SPECULATION THAT MENGISTU HAS EFFECTIVELY NEUTRALIZED LEGESSE, EITHER BY PLACING HIM QUIETLY UNDER HOUSE ARREST, ASSIGNING HIM TO DUTIES OUTSIDE OF CAPITAL, OR SENDING HIM TO EAST GERMANY FOR TRAINING.

ANTI-WESTERN PROPAGANDA HAS SUBSIDED, VISIT OF PRESIDENTIAL
EMISSARY AARON HAD SALUTARY EFFECT, AND MENGISTU, WHO ADMIT-
TEDLY IS NO KNIGHT IN SHINING ARMOR, BUT NO STOOGES EITHER,
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PAGE 02 ADDIS 01261 02 OF 02 171520Z

IS NOW LOOKING FOR MEANS OF REASSERTING HIS NONALIGNED
CREDENTIALS BEFORE SOVIETS BECOME TOO DEEPLY ENTRENCHED IN
ETHIOPIA, AT LEAST IN GAWISH'S VIEW. NARROW-MINDED ETHIOPIAN
PURSUIT OF MILITARY SOLUTION WOULD GIVE SOVIETS EXCUSE THEY
NEED TO HANG AROUND FOR DURATION AND TO CONTINUE TO MAKE
CASE THAT THEIR PRESENCE IS INDISPENSABLE FOR EPMG SUCCESS.

5. BY SAME TOKEN SOVIETS, THEMSELVES, AND CUBANS WITH THEM ARE
NOT COMPLETELY COMFORTABLE WITH IDEA OF TAKING UP MILITARY
ROLE IN ERITREA. THEY ARE AWARE THAT INSURRECTION HAS FULL
SUPPORT OF VIRTUALLY ENTIRE ERITREAN POPULATION, AND THAT
THIS WAR WOULD BE ETHIOPIAN VERSUS ETHIOPIAN, RATHER THAN
ETHIOPIAN VERSUS INVADING SOMALIS AS IN OGADEN. WHILE ETHIO-
PIAN MILITARY VICTORY IS POSSIBLE AND PROBABLE IN ERITREA,
SOVIETS ARE SENSITIVE TO ARGUMENTS THAT THEY WILL FIND THEIR
VIET NAM IN ETHIOPIA AND THEREFORE ARE RELUCTANT TO TAKE
UP POSITION AS OCCUPYING POWER IN REGION WHERE THEY WOULD
BE VIEWED WITH UNDISGUISED HOSTILITY. ACCORDINGLY, IN GAWISH'S
VIEW, SOVIETS MIGHT BE PREPARED TO COUNSEL EPMG TO MAKE SOME
CONCESSIONS TO ERITREAN GROUPS, ALL OF WHICH ARE LEFTIST IN
VARYING DEGREE, ON THEORY THAT REGIONAL AUTONOMY WOULD NOT
LEAVE ERITREA ALL THAT INDEPENDENT FROM CENTRAL AUTHORITY
AND SOVIETS WOULD BE LOOKED ON FAVORABLY AS HAVING SWUNG
EPMG OPINION AROUND. RECENT EAST GERMAN MEDIATION EFFORTS
WERE FURTHER EVIDENCE OF THIS TRAIN OF THOUGHT.

6. GAWISH SAID SUDAN HAS NO CONCEPT OF ITS OWN AS TO WHAT
KIND OF POLITICAL SOLUTION MIGHT BE MOST ACCEPTABLE TO CON-
FLICTING PARTIES, ALTHOUGH HE CLAIMED THAT NONE OF ARAB
COUNTRIES, NOT EVEN SAUDI ARABIA, STILL FAVORS INDEPENDENCE
OF ERITREA. HE WAS ALSO AWARE OF SOVIET PLANS TO DEVELOP
PORT NORTH OF ASSAB FOR ITS MILITARY USE AND OF REVIVAL OF
OLD SCHEME TO CONSIDER AUTONOMY FOR NORTHERN ERITREA,
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PAGE 03 ADDIS 01261 02 OF 02 171520Z

LEAVING ASSAB PANHANDLE AN INTEGRAL PART OF ETHIOPIA, AND
SAID THIS MAY FIGURE IN SOVIET THINKING. GAWISH DISCOUNTED
REPORTS OF EPMG-SOVIET EFFORTS TO FLIRT WITH EPLF AT EXPENSE
OF ELF AND ELF/PLS.

7. GAWISH HAD NO IMMEDIATE ANSWER FOR CONTINUED LACK OF

UNITY AMONG INSURRECTIONISH GROUPS. ASKED WHAT PRESSURE SUDAN COULD EXERT, HE REFERRED TO SUDANESE ABILITY TO DENY PORT FACILITIES AND CUT OFF SUPPLY LINES AND IMPLIED READINESS TO THREATEN SUCH A CUTOFF. HE SAID SUDAN HAS ITS OWN REASONS FOR WANTING TO AVOID ESCALATION OF ERITREAN WAR, SINCE SOVIET DESIGNS OF SUDAN COULD ONLY BE HEIGHTENED BY HOSTILITIES NEAR SUDANESE BORDER AND POSSIBILITY OF SPILL-OVER INTO SUDANESE TERRITORY. FOR ALL THESE REASONS, HE SAID SUDAN FELT SENSE OF URGENCY TO DO WHAT IT CAN TO STOP FIGHTING. HE REALIZES CHANCES OF SUCCESS ARE PROBLEMATIC, AND HE COMMENTED THAT US MOVES TO PROVIDE DEFENSIVE ARMS TO SOMALIA IN WAKE OF OGADEN WAR WOULD NOT MAKE SUDANESE TASK EASIER. BUT HE, AND PRESUMABLY HIS GOVERNMENT, SEEM DETERMINED TO GIVE ETHIOPIAN ONE MORE CHANCE TO DEMONSTRATE THAT IT IS NOT ALREADY HOPELESSLY SUCKED INTO SOVIET ORBIT AND THAT ERITREAN PROBLEM IS MORE BASIC THAN TO BE CAPABLE OF RESOLUTION BY MILITARY MEANS ALONE.MATHERON

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